



Important Message from the Commissioner

We Protect Lives.



Brenda Fitzgerald, M.D.
Commissioner, Georgia
Department of Public
Health

The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) is working with the CDC and HHS to inform and educate healthcare workers about the spread of deadly bacteria following an alarming report from the CDC. Action must be taken now throughout the health community to prevent these antibiotic-resistant bacteria from spreading to more patients. The bacteria have become increasingly resistant to last-resort antibiotics during the past decade and more hospitalized patients are getting lethal infections that, in some cases, are impossible to cure. I feel it is my responsibility as your State Health Officer to convey this call to action - individually, regionally and nationally to protect patients.

The bacteria, Carbapenem-Resistant Enterobacteriaceae (CRE) kill up to half of the patients who get bloodstream infections from them. **It is spread to patients, often from the hands of healthcare workers.** The bacteria can transfer their resistance to other bacteria creating additional life-threatening infections for patients. CRE infections currently occur in patients receiving significant medical care in hospitals, long-term acute care facilities, or nursing homes.

Enterobacteriaceae are a family of more than 70 bacteria including *Klebsiella pneumoniae* and *E. coli* that normally live in the digestive system. Over time, some of the bacteria have become resistant to a group of antibiotics known as carbapenems, often referred to as last resort antibiotics. During the last decade, CDC has traced one type of CRE from a single health care facility to health care facilities in at least 42 states, including Georgia.

The percentage of Enterobacteriaceae that are CRE increased 400% in the past decade. One type of CRE, a resistant form of *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, has shown a 700% increase in the past decade.

The CDC has released a concise, practical CRE prevention toolkit with in-depth recommendations for hospitals, long-term care facilities, nursing homes and health departments. Key recommendations include:

- Enforcing the use of infection control precautions (standard and contact precautions, **with continuous emphasis on the importance of hand washing**)
- Grouping patients with CRE together

- Dedicating staff, rooms and equipment to the care of patients with CRE
- Alerting facilities when patients with CRE transfer back and forth
- Asking patients if they have received care somewhere else (including another country)
- Using antibiotics wisely

In some parts of the world, CRE appear to be more common, and evidence show they can be controlled with basic prevention measures. Israel recently employed a coordinated effort in its 27 hospitals and dropped CRE rates by more than 70 percent through a coordinated effort of infection control at bedside. Several facilities in the United States have seen similar reductions.

Core prevention measures are critical. They can significantly reduce the problem today and for the future. It is my hope that we will work together for the health and well-being of all Georgians.

For more information on CRE click [here](#).

Thank you for all you do.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brenda Fitzgerald MD". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Brenda Fitzgerald, M.D.
Commissioner